

"She said I should follow my dream. And so I turned myself in."

College next for first Nokomis graduate

When a child is born, one of the first things he learns is how to crawl. Then he takes his first steps in learning how to walk. He may stumble along the way, but with help and support in achieving his dreams, someday he will learn how to fly.

So it is with so many of the boys who walk through the doors of Nokomis Challenge Center, an educational treatment facility at Houghton Lake. If they take to heart what they have learned and turn away from negative behavior, the sky is the limit. Eighteen-year-old Joseph Friguglietti is one such young man.

Having gone AWOL from Nokomis last year, Friguglietti was living with his girlfriend at the time in Saginaw.

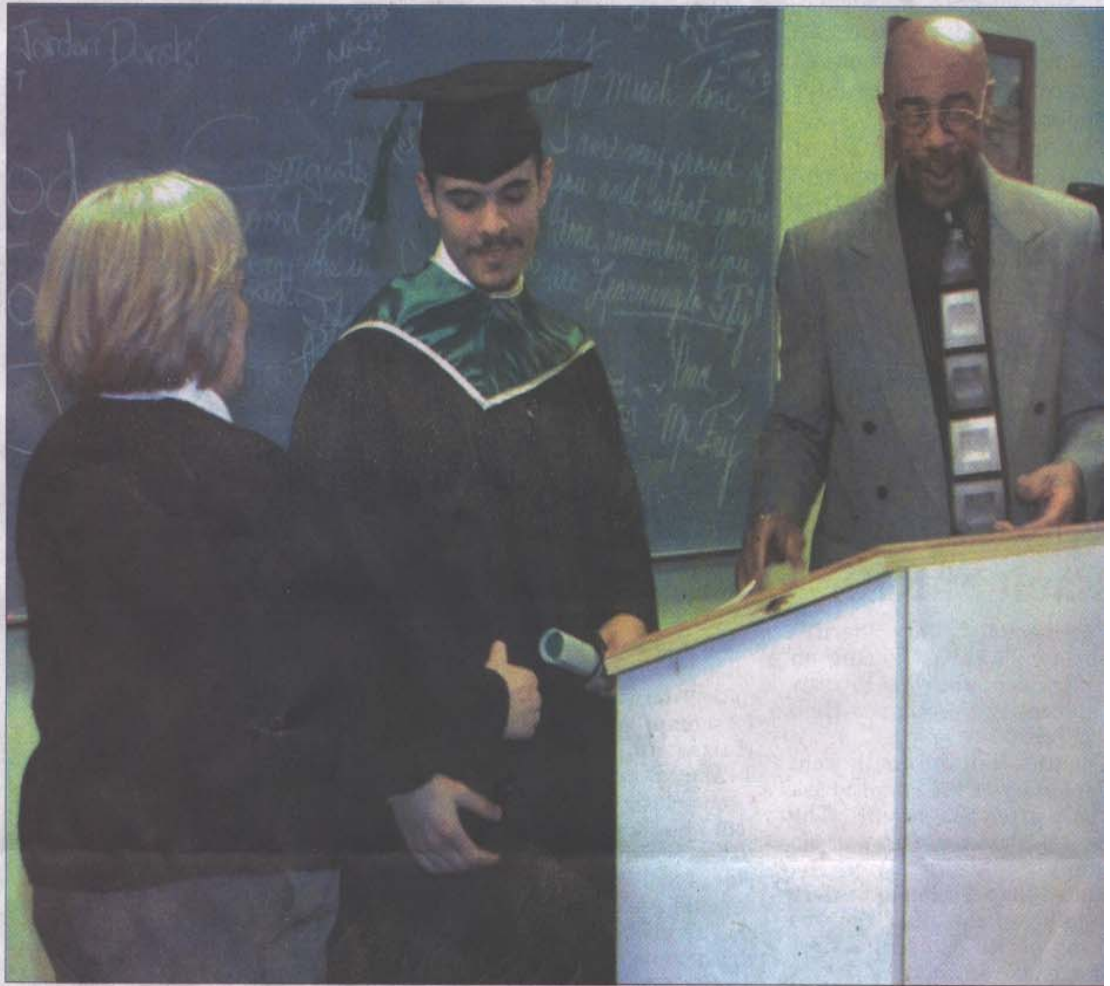
"She said I should follow my dream," he said, of being a fire fighter. "And so I turned myself in."

Friguglietti is the first Nokomis youth in the facility's history to have graduated with a diploma. Dressed in a black cap and gown, he participated in a graduation ceremony Friday before his mother, Nancy Lubanski, his cousin, Stefanie Redmond, and his friend, Veronica Cuellar, as well as staff and fellow residents of Nokomis.

"This is a very important day for me," he said in his graduation speech. "I had trouble complying with the rules." He said he had struggled through the program before going AWOL, then had to re-start. In the process, he learned he could not run away from his problems.

"You're gonna have to deal with them like a man," he said.

Friguglietti presented letters to individual staff members thanking them for their help, and thanked his family and friends for attending. He also



HANDING IT OVER

Nokomis graduate Joe Friguglietti accepts his temporary diploma from Director Debra Jones and teacher Paull Fry Fri-

presented teacher Paull Fry with a framed letter.

"Congratulations," Fry said. "Way to go, man."

Friguglietti's mother said the Nokomis staff "helped" (continued on page 8)

A MOTHER'S PRIDE

Nancy Lubanski, Friguglietti's mom, cried many tears of joy Friday as she watched her son graduate from Nokomis. "I'm proud of you," she said, beaming, "very proud."

day. The certificate will be replaced with a formal diploma in a couple of months.





SUPPORT TEAM

Friguglietti thanked all those who helped him graduate from Nokomis by writing them individual letters. Pictured are (left to right): Youth Specialist Don Farr, Youth Specialist Mark Ochoa, Director Debra Jones, Friguglietti, teacher Paull Fry, Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Debbie Banks and LeaAnn Cohee, general office assistant. (CHP)

College next for first grad

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my family a great deal. He's grown into a man...I can tell how much he's grown into the person that he is."

Friguglietti was able to graduate not only with the support of his family—his father, Peter Friguglietti, was not able to attend—but with the help of the Nokomis staff. And he gave a lot of the credit to Fry.

"He cares," Friguglietti said. "He's like a father to me. He don't beat around the bush. Everything he tells me—it's the right thing."

He said when he came back to Nokomis, it was easier than his first experience because he knew the program. This time, however, his efforts were fruitful.

Friguglietti's final academic challenge was to write a research paper a minimum of eight pages long. Having helped build a Habitat for Humanity house last year, he decided to make that his focus. He interviewed Executive Director Debbie Banks and Habitat homeowner Arleen Hosinski and ended up writing 18 pages.

His report and a collection of Habitat photos, some featuring him working in his orange Nokomis jumpsuit, were on display for visitors to review.

"It is outstanding," Fry said. "We're very proud of Joe and the work that he did."

Friguglietti said his favorite part of working with the Habitat crew was learning about roofing.

What was the difference between his first Nokomis experience and his last?

"I was faking the program," he

said. "When I first got here I didn't care about nobody. Once I started helping, I felt better."

Originally from the Detroit area, Friguglietti had behavioral problems, Lubanski said, when he lived downstate. He was hanging with the wrong crowd. She said she could have bailed him out of trouble. But instead she helped turn him in a certain direction.

"He needed to learn a lesson," Lubanski said, by attending Nokomis, "and he's learned the right lesson."

Having already been at the Pioneer Work and Learn facility in Vassar, she said, her son did not want to be told what to do. But, she said, he was still respectful.

"He's got a good heart," she said.

Friguglietti was able to attain his diploma from Nokomis through a partnership with the Mackinaw Academy, a public school in Macomb County.

Friguglietti will soon be pursuing his dream of being a firefighter and will attend Macomb Community College in May. He will start in the summer term, taking EMT and fire maintenance classes, with the hopes of completing a two-year associate degree.

In Friguglietti's commencement program were the words of a Pink Floyd song Fry had printed, "Learning to Fly." It says, in part, "A fatal attraction holding me fast/How can I escape this irresistible grasp?/No navigator to guide my way home/Unladen, empty and turned to stone/I'm a soul in tension that's learning to fly/condition grounded but determined to try."

MAKE IT HAPPEN AGAIN

Addressing the other boys at Friguglietti's graduation by name, Fry said, "I would like to see this happen again."

It is his hope that the boys will see one of their peers go through the process of graduating and have something to look forward to.

"If you've got nothing, you go back to nothing," he said, following the ceremony.

Fry said he has been trying to establish a partnership with Houghton Lake High School that

would enable Nokomis to issue diplomas for boys who earn enough credits like Friguglietti did.

Nokomis follows the Michigan Department of Education's standards and benchmarks, Director Debra Jones said. Fry said the facility is in the process of becoming accredited through North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

"It isn't some punk prison," Fry said. "We have some young men here who've made some mistakes."